

TOWN OF MANSFIELD
MANSFIELD YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU



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To the Appropriations Committee and Secondary/Elementary Education Sub-Committee,

My name is Katherine J. Bell, Psy.D. and I write you today in my role of Youth Services Supervisor and Director of the Youth Services Bureau for the town of Mansfield, Connecticut. As you consider future budget spending for the State Department of Education I ask you to consider continued funding rather than funding reduction for the 102 Youth Service Bureaus across the state of Connecticut.

In the town of Mansfield, the funding received by the Youth Services Bureau from the State Department of Education helped to create a service area that did not previously exist within the Human Services Department. Over the years this service area has been able to expand through the continued support of these funds. Mansfield Youth Services is staffed by two full-time employees and myself. With this small staff we are able to leverage resources in our community to have a large positive impact for youth and families. These services include:

- Advocacy work in policy impacting Mansfield's youngest residents ages 0-8 through Mansfield Advocates for Children
- School readiness council administration of access to community preschool slots
- School-based mentoring programs
- Community-based mentoring programs
- School social work and counseling services
- Office-based counseling services for youth and families
- Psychiatric consultation and treatment
- Positive youth development groups and events
- Prevention programming
- Grief support group
- Kindred care support group
- Parenting group and educational workshops

These services, often provided at no cost, allow for all members of our community to access supports and removes financial barriers including those associated with insurance coverage and copays. We leverage our financial resources to serve as many youth and families as possible in the community. We are able to do this through generous donations, most importantly, the donation of time. We work closely with the University of Connecticut's Community Outreach

office to recruit a high volume of quality, motivated, and invested volunteer mentors to serve students in our three elementary schools and middle school. In the past year we have had over 60 volunteer mentors who have donated over 1,500 hours of total time to our mentoring programs. Some of these mentors have returned year after year to continue to maintain positive relationships with their mentees. These programs allow us to connect with over 100 youth in our community in individualized ways that would not otherwise be possible with our small core of full-time staff. These positive mentoring connections help foster resiliency, teach coping skills, and improve social skills for a diverse group of students in the town of Mansfield. Our positive youth development groups help facilitate pro-social behaviors and offer safe, positive activities and opportunities to build peer relationships. These resiliency factors help shape outcomes and trajectories for at-risk youth in positive ways. Ultimately, this helps to decrease costs related to accessing more expensive, higher level of care, mental health services and the juvenile justice system through early interventions to help keep youth and families from reaching those points.

Each Youth Services Bureau in Connecticut operates independently to meet the needs of the communities they serve. Models that work for one YSB don't necessarily work for others based on population needs and area resources, allowing YSBs to custom-tailor their services. We ask that you continue to fund these services to allow youth and families to continue to access care, supports, and prevention strategies in order to improve outcomes for all youth in Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration,

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